Across the United States, 70 million adults are estimated to have some sort of criminal record. The vast majority of adults who are incarcerated return to the community, and many face multiple barriers to successful reentry, including finding and maintaining employment. There are two primary reasons individuals returning home from prison or jail struggle to find and keep a job: many people have minimal work experience and limited job skills; and policy and legislative barriers, coupled with employer reluctance to hire adults with criminal records, limit employment opportunities, even when they are qualified for the job or have been crime free for an extended period of time.

Governors, legislators and mayors representing every pocket of the political spectrum identify employment as a key reentry issue that must be addressed to reduce recidivism and improve public safety. Policymakers also recognize the economic costs associated with unemployment among individuals with criminal records—estimated at between $57 and $65 billion in lost output each year. The awareness of the challenge is demonstrated by the CSG State Pathways to Prosperity initiative launched by Tennessee Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris, immediate past chair of The Council of State Governments. The initiative aims to address the absence of qualified workers to meet the demand of companies, and recognizes the disqualification from employment of people who have been involved in the criminal justice system as a major contributor to this gap in available workers.

When collaborative dialogues take place, different stakeholders are more like to identify policy solutions or at least mitigate unintended consequences of well-meaning policy. To demonstrate the value of these dialogues, in 2014, the CSG Justice Center convened business executives and federal and state government officials at the White House to discuss how the public and private sectors can work together to improve employment outcomes for people with criminal records. U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez facilitated the discussion, which was inspired by the State Pathways to Prosperity initiative and designed to jumpstart similar dialogues initiated by policymakers in states across the country.

Join the CSG Justice Center on Saturday, Dec. 12th for Need Not Apply? Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Criminal Records, where speakers will present lessons learned from the 11 public-private dialogues held across the country, including feedback from local employers about what policies would be most impactful for increasing access to jobs.

By: Saturday, December 12, 2015 at 10:12 AM
Tags: 2015 CSG National Conference, Policy Area, Public Safety, Corrections, Offender Reentry